

A CHRISTMAS STORY

Old Bench, Kids Make This A Happy Holiday

Though he frequently sports a white beard and red suit, Santa Claus has been known at times to turn up in the most unlikely guises. In the least likely places. Sometimes folks can tell he's been by just by the things that happen.

Although nobody will say they actually saw him, the

people at Fern-Greenwood School, Torrance, are sure the old gent must have been curled up on a bench that was delivered to their school.

It wasn't so much their receiving the unexpected gift of a bench that makes them so sure; but the giving that resulted.

But we're getting ahead of the story.

JUST WHERE did this bench come from, and how did it happen to wind up in a lobby of a Torrance School?

No newcomer to school circles, the bench once served as a "seat of learning" for children of migratory workers in a one-room schoolhouse located on the old Ben Weston ranch in Waleria. Half a century ago ranch school children took turns sitting on it while reciting their lessons for the day. Hence, it became known as the "recitation bench." When

a portion of the ranch fell into the ownership of the Lewis Bigelow family several years ago the bench and old building went right along with the land.

A little over a year ago Bigelow learned that the Torrance Unified School District was compiling a History of Torrance to use in connection with third grade studies. After donating several rare photographs to the school district for use in the textbook, he remembered the old weather-beaten bench still standing in an out-of-the-way corner of his property. He donated it to the district (which set about the job of restoring the relic) and turned his energies to planning for his retirement.

JUST PRIOR to the Christmas holiday, the bench refinished and sturdy enough to again accommodate squirming youngsters, was delivered by district work-

men to the Fern Ave. campus of the Fern-Greenwood School. As the men unloaded it youthful eyes watched from the classroom windows.

In the third grade room the voice of the teacher droned in the background. She was talking about early Torrance. Suddenly the dismissal bell rang. Children scurried to the lobby, but instead of heading out the big double doors as they ordinarily do, they stopped. They paused to look at the bench first. A couple of the bolder ones looked around and took tentative steps towards it. As they gained courage they sidled up to it and hesitated. After a few moments, curiosity got the better part of valor. They tried it out.

To the third-graders whom the lecture on early Torrance had gone half-heard moments before, history had come alive. They talked about it in class the next day. Suddenly old Torrance and the early

Waleria ranches were part of their lives. They wanted to thank the Bigelows.

AND THAT is where Christmas entered the story. Upon investigation, Mrs. Ellen Booz, principal discovered that the Bigelows no longer lived on the one-time ranch. The retirement plans Bigelow made a year ago had borne fruit and he and his wife had gone to spend their remaining days in a rest home.

When the children learned that the convalescent home was located in nearby Lomita they decided that not only could they thank the Bigelows; but since the Christmas season was in full swing, they could bring happiness to other retired folk as well. As the third grade set about making handmade holiday greeting cards for all the residents, the idea caught on and other grades climbed aboard the bandwagon.

A sixth-grade class decided that instead of having their usual classroom Christmas party this year they would give their party to the folks at the rest home. They would spend the usual quarter on gifts; they would make the usual punch; and they would bake the usual cookies. But instead of sharing the gifts and refreshments among themselves, they would load up a couple of cars and drive the party out to the convalescent home.

WITH THE help of a room mother, a vice principal, and a teacher's husband, that's exactly what they did. But when they delivered the party-fixings, something happened. They couldn't leave. The joy on the part of their "guests" was contagious. So they broke into groups and went into the rooms and sang carols to each of the residents and gave them the gift they appreciated most of all—a visit.

Tears came to the eyes of one tiny wrinkled lady as her visitors departed. "You know," she said, "some of these folks still get visitors."



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Exchange Student Princess

An Austrian exchange student now attending Torrance High School was named honor princess at the Tartar winter formal last week.

Miss Renate Baier, who is living with Mr. and Mrs. Don Harding of 2676 Onrado St., was selected for the honor on the basis of senior class donations in the Christmas food drive.

Other princesses included Renae Johnson, freshman class; Mary Boughen, sophomore class, and Judi Rynhart, junior class.

Mother, Baby Care Courses Scheduled

A 14-hour mother and baby care course will begin at the San Pedro Red Cross classroom, 390 W. 7th St., Jan. 11.

Enrollment for the free classes, which will be taught by a specially trained registered nurse on seven consecutive Mondays and Wednesdays from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., may be made by calling Red Cross, TE 2-8321. The same course will begin at the South Bay Red Cross office, 1132 Hermosa Ave., Jan. 4 and at Torrance High School in February. Further information may be obtained at the South Bay office, FR 2-5858.

The course has proved most beneficial when taken within three months of the expected birth date according to Mrs. Arthur R. Knudson, new nursing services chairman for the Torrance-Lomita Red Cross Board.

Band Battle Deadline Set Jan. 15

Application deadline for the County Parks and Recreation 1965 Battle of the Bands is Jan. 15.

The annual scramble among Los Angeles County's teenage bands, combos and vocalists for billing at the Bowl, is scheduled to begin with auditions in February. Preliminaries follow in March and April, and finals are slated at the Bowl June 25, 1965.

Modern dance groups, drill teams and school choral ensembles should write for applications to County Parks and Recreation, 155 W. Washington Blvd., Los Angeles, or call Richmond 9-6911, ext. 554.



RECITATION BENCH . . . Trying out the "recitation bench" which is now in the lobby at Fern-Greenwood School are, from left, Richard Moore, Virginia Melton, Michelle Smith, and Scott Paulson. The bench, used by children to recite their school lessons some 50 years ago, has been refinished and donated to the school district by Lewis Bigelow, owner of part of the old Weston ranch.



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